Syllabus

PSC 242: Research Practicum in U.S. Criminal Justice Reform

Spring, 2016

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Instructors

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
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Overview

This course is a collaboration between the [University of Rochester Political Science Department](http://www.rochester.edu/college/psc) and [Measures for Justice](http://www.measuresforjustice.org/), a Rochester-based non-profit that supports criminal justice policy reform.   The course introduces students to current issues in criminal justice policy and the process of policy advocacy through a series of projects that contribute to Measures for Justice's mission.

Expectations of Students

Unlike in traditional courses, your work in this course has a direct impact on the world beyond campus.  Thus it is critical that you understand the responsibilities you assume by taking this course:

Attendance and Participation

Attend and fully participate in every weekly team work session, Fridays from 2pm to 5pm, at Measures for Justice's offices at 60 Park Avenue. If you cannot attend and productively participate in a session due to illness or other circumstances beyond your control, you will let Stu Jordan (stuart.jordan@rochester.edu) know ahead of time, and will make arrangements with him to make up the work you missed.

Weekly Independent Work

Complete the tasks assigned to you as independent work each week by the instructors to the best of your ability. Each week these tasks will take about 6 hours of your time.

Protection and Sharing of Data

Follow the instructors' guidelines about the protection and sharing of sensitive data. For instance, you will not copy any part of any Measures For Justice dataset onto any personal device, and you will not share any part of any Measures for Justice dataset with persons not enrolled in the course through email or other means.

Research Integrity

Accurately record all data that you collect. Do not fabricate data or misrepresent your contribution or the contribution of others to any work product produced as part of the course. Violation of this expectation will be treated as a violation of the College's policy on academic honesty.

Projects

This course is not organized around a series of lectures, readings and exams.  Instead, the core work of each student in the course is the completion of a series of projects.  On the coures library guide (<http://libguides.lib.rochester.edu/psc242>), you’ll find a collection of resources to support your work on the projects for this course. The following describes each project, the deliverables students are responsible for and the dates on which these deliverables are due, and outlines the schedule of activities through which students will complete them.  All the details in this section may change during the course of the semester.

The following table summarizes the deliverables and their deadlines

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Project** | **Deliverable** | **Deadline** |
| Practitioner Interviews | Presentation of 2 candidate counties for interviews | Feb 12 |
| State Legal Context | All data entered and documented | Feb 19 |
| State Pending Legislation | All pending legislation recorded and annotated | Feb 19 |
| Citizen’s State Law Briefing | 10 minute concept presentation | Feb 26 |
| Practitioner Interviews | 2 of 10 interviews completed | March 4 |
| Citizen’s State Law Briefing | Webpage content delivered, 10 minute presentation | March 18 |
| Practitioner Interviews | 6 of 10 interviews done | March 25 |
| Policy/Practice Review | 10 minute presentation of selected policy/practice | April 1 |
| Policy/Practice Review | List of 10 peer-reviewed sources in APSA citation style submitted | April 1 |
| Policy/Practice Review | Annotated bibliography due | April 8 |
| Policy/Practice Review | 10 minute presentation: synthesis of literature | April 15 |
| Practitioner Interviews | 8 of 10 interviews done | April 15 |
| Policy/Practice Review | Literature review and citizen’s issue briefing due | April 27 |
| Practitioner Interviews | 10 of 10 interviews done | April 29 |
| Practitioner Interviews | 15 minute presentation of findings | May 5 |

State Legal Context

Objectives

Measures for Justice aims to help citizens and policymakers assess the quality of local criminal justice systems and to act to address shortcomings in those systems' performance.  It's core contribution to this effort is the compilation and publication of a set of measures of the performance of every county-level criminal justice system in the United States.  These measures will assess each county's performance of core public safety functions, treatment of persons accused of crimes, and spending on law enforcement, judicial processes and corrections.

A critical challenge Measures for Justice faces is helping citizens interpret the performance measures in ways that can lead to effective political action.  For instance, suppose a citizen perusing the measures discovers that the county in which she lives, relative to other counties in her state, requires an especially large portion of persons accused of minor misdemeanors to pay bail as a condition of pretrial release.  How is this citizen to know which public officials have the power to address this disparity?  Are pretrial release decisions in her state, for instance, strictly governed by state law, and thus addressable solely through action by the state legislature?  Or does state law grant judges broad discretion over the terms of pretrial release?  Who, in short, should the citizen hold responsible for this aspect of her county's performance?

In this project, students will help Measures for Justice begin the construction of a database that can help citizens understand the roles that policy and policymakers play in the performance of county justice systems.

Deliverables, Process and Deadlines

Each student will be assigned responsibility for one state.  The student is responsible for determining and documenting the answers to a list of questions, designated by Measures for Justice, about the content of her assigned state's law at a point in time.

Each student will be assigned to his or her state at the first team meeting on January 15.  At the second team meeting, January 22, the instructors will introduce students to the questions to be asked, introduce students to data sources for the states’ laws and the spreadsheets for entering and documenting data.  **Each student must complete collection, entry and documentation of all data necessary to answer the questions about the assigned state by February 19**.

State Pending Legislation

Objectives

The state legal context project will establish a picture of key features of state law at a fixed point in time.  But it won’t show what changes to the law might be on the horizon.  This project will collect the basic information MFJ needs to inform citizens of changes to law currently being considered by state legislatures.

Deliverables, Process and Deadlines

Each student will compile a list of currently-pending legislation that will, if enacted, affect any aspect of the student’s assigned state’s criminal law, judicial process or corrections.  Each student will annotate each pending bill in the list with a brief, “plain language” summary of the bill.

At the second team meeting, January 22, the instructors will introduce students to the data sources for the states’ laws and the spreadsheets for entering and documenting the data.  **Each student must complete collection, entry and annotation of all pending legislation for her state by February 19.**

Citizen’s Briefing on State Legal Context

Objectives

While the State Legal Context and Pending Legislation projects will collect some of the raw material needed to understand the role of state law in the performance of the criminal justice system, many citizens will need a guided introduction to their states’ criminal justice processes and law.  Through this project, students will generate a “briefing” for citizens that introduces them to the key structural and legal context of their states’ criminal justice systems.

Deliverables, Process and Deadlines

Each student will produce and deliver text content for a webpage that provides a briefing on the student’s assigned state’s criminal justice process and the constraints on that process imposed by that state’s law.  The briefing should be appropriate and informative for a person with no prior knowledge of that state’s criminal justice system.  It should deliver the foundational explanation a citizen needs in order to form an accurate understanding of the role of state law plays in determining aspects of the performance of the state’s criminal justice system.  It should draw explicit connections between the state’s criminal justice processes, applicable laws, and aspects of the systems performance visible in the measures of performance published by Measures for Justice.

Although the particular content of the briefing will, of course, depend on the state to which it applies, the briefing must cover, at a minimum, the following information:

* Under the state’s law, under what circumstances may or must police arrest or issue a citation to a person suspected of a crime?
* What mechanisms does the state law put in place to make legal counsel available to persons accused of a crime who do not have the financial resources to pay for that counsel themselves?
* Once a person is arrested or issued a citation, who determines whether that person will be detained pending trial and/or the conditions of release pending trial, and how are these decisions constrained by state law?
* What role does the state’s law play in determining the amount of time that elapses between the arrest of a person suspected of a crime and the conclusion of a trial that determines his or her guilt or innocence?
* What role does the state’s law play in determining the penalties imposed on a person who pleads or is found guilty of a crime?  In cases where the state’s law does not fully specify the penalty, what powers does the law give to prosecutors and judges to determine the penalty?
* What penalties other than imprisonment and fines does state law impose or allow?  For instance, under what circumstances is a person convicted of a crime deprived of the right to vote, or barred from certain occupations?

Once the student delivers the webpage content, all of its content becomes the property of Measures for Justice.  Specifically, Measures for Justice may use any of the content the student produces in any way without giving credit to the student.

There are two deadlines associated with this project:

* **Each student must deliver a 10 minute presentation that walks the team through a an outline of the content and media to be used in the briefing at the team meeting on February 26.**The presentation must highlight what the student sees as the key creative decisions she will be making in the construction of the briefing, and seek feedback from the team on those decisions.
* **The completed webpage is due on March 18.**At the team meeting that day, the student must give a 10 minute presentation to the team highlighting the key features of the webpage content, explaining the most important decisions made about content and presentation.

Practitioner Interviews in Targeted Counties

Objectives

Although state laws can have a major impact on criminal justice outcomes, many critical decisions in the criminal justice system are left to the discretion of local criminal justice officials -- such as police, prosecutors, public defenders and judges.  Thus, one of Measures for Justice’s goals is to shed light on these officials’ practices, and the effect of they have on the performance of criminal justice systems.  This project is an attempt is a small part of a new data collection effort towards this end.

In the coming months, Measures for Justice will be fielding a web-based survey of local criminal justice officials.  The hope is that officials in every one of the approximately 3,000 counties in the U.S. will respond.  Thus, the survey necessarily asks a small number of questions, and does not request highly detailed responses from participants.  This project will pilot a method of supplementing the relatively sparse information from these surveys with more in-depth phone interviews of officials in selected counties.

Deliverables, Process and Deadlines

There are two phases to this project, each with it’s own process and deliverables.  In phase 1, each student will select two counties from his or her assigned state and justify her selection to the team.  In phase 2, each student will secure and conduct phone interviews with officials from the selected county, prepare summaries of findings from each interview, and finally prepare and deliver an oral briefing that synthesizes findings across the interviews.

Phase 1: County Selection

Phase 1 will give students a chance to explore Measures for Justice’s core dataset of county-level criminal justice system outcomes.  During the team meetings on January 29 and February 5, each student will use data analysis software to explore and compare the outcomes of all the county-level systems in her assigned state.  The goal will be to identify counties that are *difficult-to-account-for-outliers* on the measures -- Specifically, counties whose outcomes differ substantially from other counties in the state in ways that cannot be explained by known difference across counties.  **At the team meeting on February 12, each student will then give a 15 minute presentation** in which she presents two candidate counties for investigation, demonstrates, using the results of her data exploration, the ways in which those counties are outliers, and gives reason for believing that the differences in those counties outcomes cannot be easily explained by readily observable features of these counties.  The team’s job is to give critical feedback to the presenter -- questioning whether her selections are truly outliers and truly difficult to account for.

Phase 2: Phone Interviews

As of February 12, then, each student will have settled on two target counties.  The student’s job will then be to secure 30 minute phone interviews with each of a list of 5 key criminal justice officials in each of those two counties.  Students will be representing MFJ when they contact persons to schedule these intereviews and when they conduct them.  Thus, the instructors will train students and provide guidelines on how they should represent the project and organization.

In each county, the student must complete a thirty-minute phone interview with all of the following

* The district attorney or county prosecutor, or a senior attorney in the district attorney’s or county prosecutor’s office who has expert knowledge of the prosecutorial practices in the district/county.
* The chief public defender for the county, or a senior attorney in the public defender’s office who has expert knowledge on the practices of the public defender’s office.
* The county sheriff or a senior staff member or officer in the sheriff’s department with expert knowledge of law enforcement practices in the county and the operations and policies of any county jails.
* The chief of the county’s pretrial services office, or a senior staffer in that office who has expert knowledge of the use of pretrial risk assessment practices in the county.
* The chief administrative judge or other senior judge with administrative responsibility within the county judicial system.

Each interview must follow a protocol prepared by the course instructors.  Although these interviews do not need to be completed in any particular order, we require that their completion dates be staggered through the semester, so that students do not end up trying to complete all 10 required interviews in the last week or two of the semester.  Specifically, here are guidelines students should follow in getting the interviews scheduled.  These will not be treated as deadlines, but we expect students to make every effort to follow them, and keep us updated on their progress

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 3/4 | 2 out of 10 interviews scheduled |
| 3/25 | 6 out of 10 interviews scheduled |
| 4/15 | 8 out of 10 interviews scheduled |
| 4/29 | 10 out of 10 interview scheduled |

**“Completing” and interview does not mean simply conducting it.  It also requires writing up a brief summary of the findings of each interview.** This summary should record, using verbatim quotes whenever possible, the subject’s responses to each of the interview questions.  Once you turn them in, the summaries become the property of Measures for Justice, and Measures for Justice may use any part of them without crediting you.

Finally, **each student must give a 15 minute oral presentation in the final class meeting on 5/5** that highlights significant findings from their interviews and suggests explanations for the ways in which their two counties’ performance differs from those of other counties.

Policy or Practice Research Review and Briefing

Objectives

This project is an opportunity for each student to survey existing research in depth on a single issue of criminal justice policy or practice, and use what they learn to build a briefing designed to educate web-users on that issue and its relevance to the performance of local criminal justice systems.

Deliverables, Process and Deadlines

Work on this project begins at the team meeting on 3/25.  On that day, each student will meet individually with one of the instructors to discuss and select a few policies or practices as candidates for the project.

There are five deliverables for this project.  First, each student will write a review of the scholarly literature on the policy or practice she selects **due on April 27**.  The review must report and synthesize the research findings of at least 10 peer-reviewed articles or books.  Every book or article included must focus on measuring the effects of the selected policy or practice on criminal justice outcomes or on discerning the determinants of the adoption by the relevant political jurisdiction of the selected policy or practice.

Grading Rubric: Literature Review

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Marginal**  **1** | **Developing**  **2** | **Proficient**  **3** | **Score** |
| **Sources** | Fewer than six sources and/or sources not appropriate (do not meet the specifications in the syllabus). | Six to 9 sources that meet the specifications in the syllabus. | Ten or more sources that meet the specifications in the syllabus. |  |
| **Source quality** | Over-reliance on low quality journals and/or sources that are exceptionally brief. Source selection criteria not outlined and/or source not clearly relevant. | Includes primary research article and/or articles from well-respected journals in the field. Source criteria for selection is clear and relevant. | Includes a variety of sources from high quality journals, juried (peer reviewed) publications, source criteria clear and defensible. |  |
| **Organization** | No clear organization or organizational plan inconsistent. | Well organized with organizational plan obvious throughout. | Organization pattern demonstrates understanding of literature information on the topic (historical, general to specific, segments of the topic, etc.) and organizational plan enhances the presentation, promoting ease in reading. |  |
| **Mechanics** | Errors distract the reader, to the extent the meaning is unclear. | Some significant errors are present, but the overall meaning is clear. | Virtually free from mechanical, grammatical, punctuation, and spelling errors. |  |
| **Connection to Defined problem area** | Mismatch between problem area defined and the selection of articles/sources. | Apparent match between problem area defined and selection of articles/sources, although perhaps not clearly articulated. | Shows thorough understanding of the relationship of the sources selected to the problem area. |  |
| **Synthesis/ Summary** | Lacks summary or any synthesis of the information, leaving each article as a stand alone piece and/or misinterprets the information and makes statements unsupported by the literature. | Summarizes the overall picture obtained from the literature review and synthesizes the knowledge gained. | Summarizes and shows insightful synthesis of the literature information, including analysis of gaps in and/or limitations of the research. |  |
| **Citations/ References: Proper style format** | Contains spelling or grammatical errors, does not follow APSA style, lacks or uses quotations and/or citations ineffectively or inappropriately, lack of transitions. | Contains no spelling or grammatical errors, follows APSA style, uses quotations and citations appropriately, transitions included. | Contains no spelling or grammatical errors, demonstrates creative use of language, conscientiously follows APSA style, uses quotations and citations to enhance written narrative, smooth transitions. |  |
| **Timeliness** | Material was submitted more than one class late. | Material was submitted up to one class late. | Material was submitted on time. |  |

Grading Scale:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| A | A- | B | B- | C | C- | D | D- | E |
| 24 of 24 | 23 of 24 | 22 of 24 | 21 of 24 | 20 of 24 | 19 of 24 | 18 of 24 | 17 of 24 | 16 of 24 |
| 100% | 96% | 92% | 88% | 83% | 79% | 75% | 71% | 67% |

Second, each student will give a 10 minute presentation to the team on the policy or practice one which he or she has chosen to focus **at the team meeting on 4/1**.  The presentation must give a brief description of the policy or practice and a tentative statement of its significance for the performance of criminal justice systems.  Each student must also submit a list of at least 10 peer-reviewed article or book citations in APSA style to be used as the basis for the literature review.

Third, each student must submit an annotated bibliography for review and grading by the instructors **due on April 8**.  The annotated bibliography lists the sources for the literature review and gives brief summaries of the findings from each that the student plans to draw on in the literature review.  Note that this means that a substantial portion of time needs to be devoted to locating and reviewing literature during the week spanning 4/1 and 4/7.

Grading Rubric - Annotated Bibliography

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Marginal**  **1** | **Developing**  **2** | **Proficient**  **3** | **Score** |
| **# of Sources** | Fewer than six sources | Six to 9 sources | Ten or more sources |  |
| **Credibility** | Few sources are from credible, scholarly materials. | Some sources are from credible, scholarly materials. | All sources are from credible, scholarly materials. |  |
| **Annotations** | Most annotations are either too short or too long; Annotations do not describe the source material; annotations offer no insight | Some annotations may be too short or too long; Annotations adequately describe the source material, but lack insight | Annotations succinctly and comprehensively describe the source material; Annotations offer great insight into the source material |  |
| **Citations/ References: Proper style format** | Contains spelling or grammatical errors, does not follow APSA style, lacks or sues quotations and/or citations ineffectively or inappropriately, lack of transitions. | Contains no spelling or grammatical errors, follows APSA style, uses quotations and citations appropriately, transitions included. | Contains no spelling or grammatical errors, demonstrates creative use of language, conscientiously follows APSA style, uses quotations and citations to enhance written narrative, smooth transitions. |  |
| **Timeliness** | Material was submitted more than one class late. | Material was submitted up to one class late. | Material was submitted on time. |  |

Grading Scale:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| A | A- | B | B- | C | C- | D | D- | E |
| 15 of 15 | 14 of 15 | 13 of 15 | 12 of 15 | 11 of 15 | 10 of 15 | 9 of 15 | 8 of 15 | 7 of 15 |
| 100% | 93% | 87% | 80% | 73% | 67% | 60% | 53% | 47% |

Fourth, students will give a 10 minute presentation on their selected policy/practice and the findings of the research **during the team meeting on 4/15**.  The presentation should (a) describe the policy or practice for the team, (b) describe the implications for the literature reviewed on the policy or practice *as a whole* (meaning, the student should not just list each piece of research and it’s separate findings, but should synthesize the work into a few basic claims or arguments).  The team will give feedback aimed at helping the student develop an articulate synthesis of the research literature for the literature review and citizen’s briefing.

Fifth, each student will create a two-page citizen’s issue briefing on her selected policy or practice **due on April 27**.  The briefing must be accessible to a layperson.  It must describe the selected policy or practice, explain (drawing on the findings from the literature review) the significance of the policy or practice for the performance of local criminal justice systems, and explain the political processes that determine whether or to what extent a jurisdiction adopts the policy or practice.  Once submitted, the briefing becomes the property of Measures for Justice.  Any portion of it may be used by Measures for Justice without attribution to the student.

Grading

Each student will be given a score on a 4-point scale on their work on each of the 5 projects.  Those 4-point scores will then be averaged (with equal weights applied to each score) to generate an overall 4-point score for each student.  The overall 4-point score will then be assigned a letter grade according to the following rules:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Overall 4-point score** | **Letter grade for course** |
| above 3.85 | A |
| above 3.50, at or below 3.85 | A- |
| above 3.15, at or below 3.5 | B+ |
| above 2.85, at or below 3.15 | B |
| above 2.50, at or below 2.85 | B- |
| above 2.15, at or below 2.50 | C+ |
| above 1.85, at or below 2.15 | C |
| above 1.50, at or below 1.85 | C- |
| above 1.15, at or below 1.50 | D+ |
| above 0.85, at or below 1.15 | D |
| above 0.50, at or below 0.85 | D- |
| at or below 0.50 | E |

Each student’s four point score on each project will in turn be computed as a weighted average of four-point scores assigned to each deliverable for the project at follows:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Project/Deliverable** | **Weight towards project score** |
| State Legal Context |  |
| Completed entry of all data | 100% |
| State Pending Legislation |  |
| Completed entry and annotation of all data | 100% |
| Citizen’s Briefing on State Legal Context |  |
| 10 minute concept presentation | 5% |
| 10 minute presentation of final webpage | 5% |
| Final citizen’s briefing webpage | 90% |
| Practitioner Interviews in Targeted Counties |  |
| Presentation of 2 selected counties | 5% |
| Complete interviews with summaries | 90% (9% per interview) |
| Presentation of interview findings | 5% |
| Policy/Practice Research Review |  |
| Presentation of selected policy/practice | 2% |
| List of peer-reviewed sources | 2% |
| Annotated Bibliography | 2% |
| Presentation of synthesis of literature | 2% |
| Literature review | 46% |
| Citizen’s briefing on policy/practice | 46% |

Finally, the 4-point score on each deliverable will be assigned according to a rubric.   The rubric for each deliverable will be written and distributed by the instructors well before its due date.